



By James B. Mahan

Sen. Margaret Chase Smith and her administrative aide, William Lewis Jr.

## Senator's Vigil

By Maxine Cheshire

Sen. Margaret Chase Smith, outspoken critic of ab-senteeism among her colleagues, missed 13 consecutive roll-call votes this month to keep a hospital vigil at the bedside of the aide who has been called "the master strategist . . . and . . . moving force behind her remarkable career."

For nearly two weeks, Mrs. Smith occupied a VIP suite at Walter Reed Hospital to be near William C. Lewis Jr., the 58-year-old administrative assistant who helped put her in the Senate in 1948 and has dedicated his life since to her career.

Lewis suffered a severe heart attack on Dec. 9, when he drove Mrs. Smith there to undergo a routine medical checkup. The Maine Republican's Senate seat was empty from that day until adjournment on Dec. 17.

Mrs. Smith moved into the VIP suite the day Lewis was stricken and told a Portland (Maine) Press-Herald reporter that she would return to Capitol Hill only when he was out of danger.

She spent Christmas and her 74th birthday watching anxiously for his improvement.

A conscientious lawmaker who has maintained a 91 per cent voting record, her absence from the Senate was viewed by colleagues as extraordinary.

Mrs. Smith vacated the suite at Walter Reed on Dec. 20, according to a hospital spokesman. On that same day, she issued a statement, suggesting that any member of Congress who fails to vote at least 60 per cent of the time in any one session should be expelled from Congress.

Until Sen. Smith underwent hip surgery in 1968, she had built up a record of 2,941 consecutive votes.

Yesterday, Lewis was still in the hospital's intensive care unit, but his condition was described as "improved" by a Walter Reed spokesman. So much so, in fact, that he was reported to be able to handle the most important mail himself and calling her office to give instructions to junior staff members.

His health may be a critical factor in her political future.

The Portland Press-Herald, in an article providing Maine readers a unique look at Lewis' close, 23-year association with Mrs. Smith, speculated that her aide's condition may prompt a decision against seeking re-election next year.

Don Larrabee, the paper's Washington correspondent, wrote:

"The name of William C. Lewis Jr. may not have been a household word in Maine these past 23 years. In Washington, it is synonymous with Sen. Margaret Chase Smith . . . Lewis is treated with all the courtesy, honor and respect accorded the senator herself. He is universally recognized as her alter ego without whom no major decision has been made for almost a quarter of a century.

"This being the accepted fact in the White House, the Pentagon and other high councils of government, it is little wonder that news of Lewis' heart attack has set off unusual speculation about the political future of Sen. Smith."

He continued:

"In the best of circumstances (Lewis) cannot return to the arduous demands of the Senate office without limitations for the coming months and this could cause the senior senator from Maine to make an agonizing appraisal of her public role."

Larrabee called Lewis a "queenmaker" and "the master strategist . . . the moving force behind her remarkable career."

"At a testimonial for Sen. Smith last year," Larrabee added, "he was introduced as the 'prime minister.' Everyone in the Washington audience, from Defense Sec-

retary Melvin Laird to the Secretary of State, caught and appreciated the significance of that tribute."

Acting as office manager, adviser, press secretary, researcher, legislative assistant and political strategist, Larrabee said, Lewis had "done the work of five other men in most offices, and, by the senator's own admission, he had worked too hard for too long."

Larrabee credited Lewis with guiding Sen. Smith through her famous "Declaration of Conscience" speech in 1950, when she stood up to the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy.

"Lewis, more than anyone else," Larrabee continued, "made it possible for her to be the first woman in history to be seriously proposed and actually placed in nomination for the presidency in 1964."

Before Lewis was stricken, Sen. Smith had not announced her intention to seek a fifth term. Mrs. Smith's Senate seat is considered vulnerable for the first time in her long years as the biggest vote-getter in her state. There are predictions of a tough fight in the June pri-

mary and another from the Democrats in November.

Without Lewis at her side and able to give the campaign maximum effort, some political observers in Maine are doubtful that she could meet the challenge.

Mrs. Smith has had the benefit of his guidance since her days in the House of Representatives during World War II. They became closely associated when he was serving on the House Naval Affairs Committee as legal counsel.

Lewis, an independently wealthy Oklahoman who is part Chickasaw Indian, has a master's degree in public relations from Harvard. Lewis recognized star quality in Mrs. Smith, a widow who used her late husband's insurance money to finance a successful election campaign to succeed him in Congress when he died of a heart attack in 1940.

Lewis, a bachelor, enlisted his parents to help him get Mrs. Smith elected to the Senate the first time. It was Lewis' mother who conceived the idea of using penny postcards to keep in contact with voters who

could not help but appreciate that this was all the poor widow could afford in a campaign against two million-aire opponents.

The Lewis family "adopted" Mrs. Smith. When his parents were living, the four of them occupied a modernistic six-room house he built in Silver Spring.

After the deaths of the senior Lewises, Mrs. Smith continued to live there in a basement apartment.

In Maine, Mrs. Smith resides in a house built on land bought by Lewis on Casco Bay, overlooking the Atlantic at Cundys Harbor.

Mrs. Smith's loyalty to Lewis through the years has made headlines on occasion, once when she blocked the Air Force promotion of actor Jimmy Stewart to the rank of general.

She was accused by the Pentagon at the time of holding it up because Lewis had been denied a similar position in the reserves. He subsequently moved up to major general, a rank he currently holds.